



I've Got You by 2Dglasses

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Summary: After the Battle of Starcourt, Joyce takes El home with her, Will and Jonathan. As she does her best to take care of the girl, she realises just how broken El is. From everything.

I've Got You

It had been an exhausting week. For everyone. Infiltrating a secret underground Russian base, escaping from an army at the 4th of July Fair, fighting a giant monster made from melted people not once, but four separate times. Yes, exhausted was a light term to use at this stage. And as the remaining members of The Party regrouped outside the burning Starcourt Mall under the pouring rain, bruised, bleeding and broken, nobody was really sure what to do.

Hopper's death was felt by everybody. Even for those who weren't close to the chief, seeing El crumple to her knees into a puddle of warm rain displayed to them just how important he was. Take Robin, her first time to really meet El was when the girl had flung a car at a bunch of Russians looking to kill her and her misfit squad. Then the next thing she knew, the girl was on the ground writhing in agony as a guy she barely recognised from school was cutting the her leg open with a butcher knife. And now as Robin sat next to Steve in the back of an ambulance, she couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sadness as she watched the mysterious girl on the ground being held by the lady dressed as a Russian soldier. She found out from Steve that she was, of course, Will and Jonathan's mother.

Joyce was holding onto El as tightly as she could. To her surprise, the girl was completely silent, but she was holding onto the older woman just as tightly. She thought back to just a few hours previous, to El lying back into Hopper's warm embrace, her injured leg propped up on Joyce's own lap. She had glanced at them both and saw just how right they looked together. Father and Daughter.

Now, however, that relationship was forever broken. Torn apart after only a few years of being. Every time Hopper had come to Melvald's seeking parenting advice, Joyce could see how emotionally invested in this young girl's life he had become. At the time, Joyce had always found it quite comical. But thinking back to when she had first met Eleven and how just completely lost she looked, she knew that her instant desire to protect the girl was felt by Hopper too.

So she made a decision right there as she held her. She would take her home tonight. Mike was reluctant to leave El, especially after

being by her side and witnessing firsthand everything that she been through over the last few days, but Joyce told him he could see her first thing in the morning. He also needed to take care of himself, so after reassuring El that he would come to the Byer's house by nine zero zero, he made his way over to his big sister.

After making sure everybody had a way of getting home safely and was relatively okay, as much as they could be considering the circumstances, Joyce, her two sons and Eleven made their way back to their place. It was strange, this time around, coming back to a house that had not been altered by recent events. No Christmas lights, no drawings of tunnels, now only a quiet space just as it had been left a few days ago. Joyce and Jonathan brought El into Will's bedroom and sat her on the edge of his bed. Her posture was hunched and her head hung forward. She was exhausted.

Joyce asked Will to stay with her as she and her oldest son went to find her something fresh to wear. It also gave Joyce a chance to shed that uncomfortable Russian uniform. Looking into the mirror, she only now saw how ridiculous she looked, but also how tired she was. It was just after three a.m after all.

Will sat next to El on his own bed. He could feel a heavy tiredness in the air as he took in her side profile. Her head hung down so that her chin almost touched her chest. He eyes were closed, but she was still awake, barely holding herself up by her grip on the edge of the bed. Her breaths were shallow and Will could feel the mattress shift with every shaky breath. He took in the sight of her. Really took it in. The skin that peaked out over her white bandaged leg was still darkly discoloured and he could see she wasn't putting her full weight on it. Seeing her scream on the floor of the mall. What a horrifying memory. He moved up to see a dark bruise around her left wrist. That was new, he thought. Then of course he saw the red grip wrapped around her throat. That was a moment that still terrified him. Watching her almost die and being completely paralyzed with fear is an image that will never leave his mind. Among many others he had stored away up there.

Then he looked at her face. The bandage on her forehead another blatant sign of just how much pain The Mind Flayer had inflicted on her. How close he had come to killing her. And in that moment Will

had a thought. All this time, he had been explaining what it had been like to his friends and family, what it felt like being consumed and hurt by The Mind Flayer. And now, the girl next to him had been completely taken a part by the exact same entity that had made the last year of his life a living hell. He had left his mark on her also. Even after the faint memory of meeting the girl with the shaved hair in The Upside Down, and being told about 'the girl with the superpowers' by Mike, Dustin and Lucas, and even after meeting her for the first time, he instantly felt his connection with her strengthen.

She was not 'Some stupid girl.' She was his friend.

Will reached forward and placed his hand on her leg, gently rubbing his thumb along the dark fabric of her pants and feeling how warm she was underneath.

"I'm sorry, El."

He wasn't even sure what he was apologising for. For her losing Hopper. For how broken her body must be. For not reaching out to her after she helped save him twice. But his train of thought was interrupted by the weight of her head which was now resting on his shoulder.

And they just stayed like this until Joyce returned. The sight of her son and Hopper's daughter made her smile. The woman was wearing some more appropriate clothing and had brought an old shirt and pants of Jonathan's for El to wear. She stepped through and gave Will a soft look.

"Honey, why don't you go wash up? I'll take care of her."

The boy nodded gently and took El by the shoulders, straightening her as he stood slowly. Once he was sure she could keep herself balanced he turned to his mother.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

He was referring to Hopper. She took Will by the arm and gave him a warm rub.

"I'll be fine."

He knew his mother was strong so he nodded and made his way out of the room towards his brother. Joyce turned to the girl and knelt down in front of her still form on the bed. She scooted forward so that she was kneeling almost between El's knees and looked up at her face. Her eyes were closed, but she could see how dark and tired they were. Some dried blood was still crusted around her nostrils and ears and the bandage covered almost the entire left side of her forehead. Joyce couldn't help notice that she didn't have this injury the last time she had seen her. What had happened since then? Judging from Mike's own bandage and how defeated Max had looked, Joyce surmised that something horrible had happened at the mall.

"El, sweetie, can you open your eyes for me?"

After a moment, those dark orbs peered through heavy lids and communicated only one thing; exhaustion.

"Okay, honey. Let's get you out of these clothes and into something more comfortable."

With that, Joyce reached up to try and figure out how to loosen the suspenders that were twisted around El's shoulder. She stood up fully and peered over the girl's back only to see the same set up. Confused, she knelt back down, but saw that El had unclipped the suspenders from her belt for Joyce. The woman made an amused face at the girl.

"Oh."

She chuckled and removed the straps so that they lay on the bed behind El, still attached to the back of her pants.

"Okay, let's see about this shirt."

Joyce reached up to unbutton the first few buttons of the yellow and black designed shirt, but stopped when she saw El's neck.

"Oh, honey..."

She brought her fingertips up to smooth over the rough redness on the girl's small neck. She hadn't noticed back at the mall, but now that she was so close to the girl, the full extent of what had happened became more clear to her.

"Does it hurt?"

El shook her head slowly, still just blankly looking ahead.

"Okay."

Joyce spoke softly and continued to unbutton the rest of El's shirt. The girl was wearing a tank top underneath so Joyce gently pulled the vibrant fabric away from her small body. She carefully placed the nice shirt down on the bed beside her, but when she looked back up she felt her stomach drop.

There were bruises covering the young girl's upper arms and torso. There was another angry one wrapped around her left wrist also.

"El..."

Joyce inched a little closer and took both of the girl's hands in her own.

"Honey, what happened?"

The girl closed her eyes hard and after a moment she looked back down at Joyce through furrowed brows.

Instantly Joyce saw the exact same face as when her and Eleven had been preparing for the bath tub two years previous. The sad and pained look in her eye was like a mirror image.

"M-Mind Flayer... almost got me..."

Joyce knew that there was so much behind what El had just said. She knew it had taken the girl almost all of the little strength that she had left to say those few words. She wanted so much to take her in her arms and absorb all of the hurt and pain from her. From the moment she had met El, the girl had kept giving and giving and every time she had seen her again she seemed to have been more hurt. She wanted to make everything better, but as she looked up at her again she saw that the poor girl's eyes were barely open.

"Okay, let's- let's get you to bed, sweetie. We can talk about everything tomorrow."

She sped the process along and got the exhausted girl dressed and into Will's bed as fast as she could. All the while she could feel tears threaten to spill from her own eyes. She arranged the covers over El's prone form and reached down, giving her a kiss on her forehead before feeling a grip in her hand. She glanced back down at the girl's sad face.

"Stay."

The woman smiled sadly and nodded.

"Of course, honey."

Without letting go of her hand, Joyce sat down on the floor next to the bed. After she saw El's face soften as exhaustion took over the poor girl's body she felt a presence at the door. She turned to see her two sons.

Will smiled at the sight of his mother with Eleven.

"I'm going to stay with her tonight. Will you two be okay?"

Jonathan nodded and put an arm on his little brother's shoulder.

"Yeah, mom. We'll be fine."

Joyce's warm smile told them the same.

"Good night, boys. I'll be right here if you need me."

"Good night, mom."

Will followed Jonathan to his room and Joyce turned back to El, rubbing her thumb along the child's smooth hand. She felt her head becoming more heavy as she rested against the mattress, sleep finding her too.

It didn't last long. After what felt like only moments, Joyce was jostled awake. She glanced at the clock on Will's bed side table. Five forty five a.m. It had been a few hours. She glanced up and discovered the reason why she was now awake. El was now curled in a ball in the bundle of sheets. Joyce stood up and sat at the edge of

the bed immediately, trying to grab a hold of the girl's shoulders. She instantly felt how hot to the touch El was. Sweat shone from the girl's skin and Joyce could hear her soft voice through the darkness.

"No... no..."

Joyce was becoming worried when she couldn't initially wake her up.

"N-Not Papa... Hop... D-Dad..."

Joyce felt a grip around her heart and tears instantly formed in her eyes.

"Good... good... not m-monster..."

There was then a pained noise from the body in the sheets and Joyce decided that she needed Eleven to be awake.

"El, honey. Sweetie, I need you to wake up now."

She shook the child a little harder than she would have hoped she'd have to, but it worked. El jolted awake into heavy breaths. She then felt a warm grip on her arms and turned into the embrace.

"Oh, honey. It's okay. It was just a dream. You're okay."

The girl blinked through the darkness and was able to make out Joyce's face. Once she confirmed who it was she fell back onto the pillow and brought her hands up to her face. She let out an exhausted sigh and started crying.

Joyce's heart was broken. She immediately placed her hand on the girl's stomach and leaned down to soothe her.

"What's wrong, honey? Tell me what's wrong."

El shook as she cried through her hands.

"E-Everything..."

That was all it took for Joyce to be lie down beside the girl, take her into her arms and hold her as close as she could. The poor girl's body

was like a furnace as she shook and cried into the woman's shoulder.

"Shh, shh, shh. You're okay, baby. I've got you."

She didn't even try to stop her own tears fall this time. She began to imagine how many times this girl had woken up like this in the middle of the night and cried into Hopper's arms. Or before that even. When there was nobody's arms she could cry into. She thought back to meeting her mother and aunt, hearing about the experiments, seeing the bedroom she was meant to have grown up in. She'd been in the lab numerous times. She'd seen where Eleven had actually grown up.

She thought about everything this child must have gone through her whole life. Even in the last week alone. Seeing those bruises all over her body. Fighting that monster. Seeing her rip a piece of that thing out of her own body. Losing her father. Losing Hop...

It was right in that moment that Joyce decided. She was going to make sure that this girl would never get hurt again. She was going to make sure that she would always have a home.

El was a part of her family now.

"I've got you now, honey. I've got you..."